

Tainted S. Plainfield lot may join cleanup list

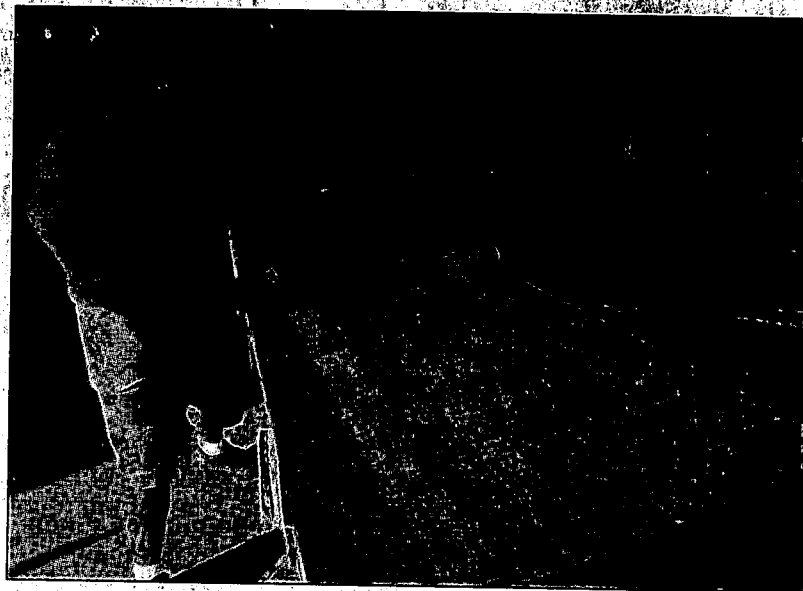
By DAVID HILGEN
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SOUTH PLAINFIELD — The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is considering adding a contaminated industrial site in the borough to its National Priorities List, guaranteeing its long-term cleanup.

The owners of Hamilton Industrial Park already have agreed to take short-term steps to protect tenants and their employees, said Rich Cahill, a spokesman for the agency's regional office in New York.

Unacceptable levels of polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs), cadmium and lead have been detected in soil at the park. PCBs have been shown to cause cancer in laboratory animals and can lead to birth defects in humans.

The industrial park would join nine other contaminated "Superfund" sites in Central Jersey already on the



Courier-News photo by Ed Pagliarini

Wally Mann, co-owner of DSM Enterprises, which makes awnings for buildings, moved his business to the back of Hamilton Industrial Park in South Plainfield to get away from the contamination.

EPA's National Priorities List. Two of those sites contain PCBs, and four contain heavy metals.

Federal and local officials have assured residents there is no immediate health threat in South Plainfield, but tenants of the industrial park remain concerned.

Wally Mann, co-owner of DSM Enterprises, which makes awnings

for buildings, moved his business from the rear of the industrial park to a building near the Hamilton Boulevard entrance. He made the move to get into a nicer building, but it also placed him farther from the contaminated areas.

"When I was in the back, the dust

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SITE: PCB contamination

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used to blow right through the building," Mann said.

The park's owner, Norpak DSC of Newark, will pave the gravel driveway and erect fences around other contaminated areas, Cahill said. The paving, which could begin as early as July 7, will prevent cars and trucks from kicking up contaminated dust.

Cornell-Dubilier, an electronics manufacturer, has been blamed for the contamination. The agency said the Wayne-based company dumped PCB-contaminated materials and other hazardous substances at the site, which it occupied from 1936 to 1962.

The EPA hasn't decided if it will try to force Cornell-Dubilier or the current owner to clean up the site, but under the federal Superfund law, the agency can require them to do so.

PCBs, which were widely used to manufacture electrical equipment, were banned in the United States in 1977. Cahill said PCBs are, perhaps, the most pervasive contaminants found in the environment. They have been detected in ice in the Antarctic and in the air over the Atlantic Ocean, he said.

No one at Cornell-Dubilier could be reached for comment.

The contaminated site has been the topic of town meetings here the past two weeks. Last Thursday, EPA officials met informally with about 15 concerned residents, Cahill said.

Subdha Gopal, who lives on Spicer Avenue, across the street from the industrial park, is worried about how the contaminated soil will affect her family's health and the value of her property. She has warned her 14-year-old son, Steven, and his friends about the site.

"I stop him from going over there, but sometimes they play ball, and they have to go in the bushes," she said.

Many industrial park tenants learned there were toxic chemicals in the ground last summer, when EPA workers began taking soil samples.

But the contamination has been the topic of public meetings for about four years, Mayor Daniel J. Gallagher said. And last year, Norpak DSC filed a tax appeal with the borough, claiming the discovery of toxic chemicals had reduced the value of the 33-acre property, he said.

Tony French moved his custom engineering firm, Fabrication Technologies, into the park three years ago. The business is in a long, corrugated-steel building at the rear of the park, close to fenced-in areas where signs warn of hazardous wastes.

He said he asked Norpak DSC if the site was contaminated before he moved there and was told, "everything was fine."

Superfund sites in Central Jersey

Somerset County:

■ **American Cyanamid**, Bridge-water. **Type of contamination:** Volatile organic compounds and a concentration of heavy metals and cyanide. **Status:** Groundwater treatment system in place.

■ **Brook Industrial Park**, Bound Brook. **Type of contamination:** Variety of pesticides, volatile organic compounds and heavy metals. **Status:** Design of remedial program will begin in 1998.

■ **Higgins Disposal**, Hasty Acres Riding Club, Franklin. **Type of contamination:** PCBs and volatile organic compounds. **Status:** Remedial work will begin in 1998. Construction has begun on water-treatment system.

■ **Higgins Farm**, Route 518, Franklin. **Type of contamination:** Volatile organic compounds and heavy metals. **Status:** Construction has begun on water-treatment plant.

■ **Montgomery Housing Development**, Route 518. **Type of contamination:** Volatile organic compounds and contaminated groundwater. **Status:** Work under way on pump and treatment system to remove contaminated water.

Hunterdon County:

■ **De Rewal Chemical Co.**, Kingwood. **Type of contamination:** Organic compounds and heavy metals. **Status:** Planning under way for excavation and off-site disposal of contaminated soil.

■ **Myers Property**, Lower Kingtown Road, Franklin. **Type of contamination:** Volatile organic compounds and pesticides. **Status:** Tests being done on a nearby creek and adjacent property.

Middlesex County:

■ **CHEMSOL**, Flemington Street, Piscataway. **Type of contamination:** PCBs and volatile organic compounds. **Status:** Water-treatment plant being designed.

Morris County

■ **Asbestos dumps**, Long Hill. **Type of contamination:** Asbestos-contaminated soil. **Status:** Contaminated material has been removed or covered with clean dirt.

Source: U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 2 office

"The thing that gripped us is we asked these questions before we moved here," French said.

Officials at Norpak DSC declined to comment.